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Clash of
the Santas

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PRESS PACK

INTRODUCTION	Page 3
FOREWORD BY WRITER JEFF POPE	Page 4
CAST LIST	Page 5
SYNOPSIS	Page 6
INTERVIEW WITH ROBSON GREEN	Page 7
INTERVIEW WITH MARK BENTON	Page 9
PRODUCTION CREDITS	Page 12

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Clash of the Santas

Following the soar-away success of *Christmas Lights*, *Northern Lights* and *City Lights*, ITV reunites Robson Green and Mark Benton in **Clash of the Santas**, a rip-roaring rollicking Christmas special for 2008.

Clash of the Santas is a heart-warming Christmas tale full of comedy, action that will rekindle everyone's belief in the power of Santa. The 120-minute film sees Colin (**Robson Green**) and Howie (**Mark Benton**) hot foot over to Lithuania to participate in a Santa convention.

Nicola Stephenson returns as Colin's understanding wife, Jackie, who is at home desperately willing Colin to make it back in time for Christmas Day with his children. **Sian Reeves** also revives her role as Pauline, Howie's estranged wife, who is planning a French Christmas and turkey fricassee with new beau Jean Luc, and Victoria.

Bah humbug Howie has unexpectedly been asked to represent England in the annual Santa competition, much to the chagrin of Colin who thinks his dedication to Christmas and Santa appearances at the school fair make him by far the better candidate.

Despite his protestations, Christmas cynic Howie remains the firm choice and fervent believer Colin has to settle for accompanying him as his cheerleading elf. Little does he know that all the other elves are girls and his elf skirt will leave nothing to the imagination.

The essence of the story, in true Christmas style, is about the power of believing in Santa Claus. Will Howie become a true believer? Will Colin fulfil his Christmas destiny? And will they make it back to their families in time for Christmas day?

Also starring in **Clash of the Santas** is **Ian Puleston Davies** as Beryl, the Welsh competitor who has joined the competition as a way of getting to know the elves and the Nativity's Virgin Mary... in a very biblical manner. **Edward Petherbridge** plays the village elder and **Emma Cunniffe** is Alice, the slightly Santa obsessed grotto manager.

Robson Green comments: "I'm so pleased Colin and Howie are returning for this Christmas special, particularly as the script is such a rip roaring journey to Christmas – challenging everyone to believe in Santa. I'm also delighted to be working with Mark, Nicola and Sian again; we're going to have an absolute ball."

Clash of the Santas has been written by Jeff Pope (Executive Producer *See No Evil: The Moors Murders*, *Joanne Lees: Murder in the Outback*, *The Last Hangman*), who created the *Christmas Lights*, *Northern Lights* and *City Lights* series with Bob Mills (*Shameless*, *The Last Hangman*) in 2004. It is an ITV Studios commission from Controller of Comedy Saurabh Kakkar's department and is produced by Chris Carey (*What We Did On Our Holiday*) and directed by Paul Seed (*Perfect Day: The Funeral*, *The Booze Cruise*).

The 120 minute special will air at Christmas 2008 on ITV1. **Clash of the Santas** has been commissioned by ITV's Entertainment and Comedy commissioning team, Paul Jackson and Michaela Hennessey Vass.

Clash of the Santas

FOREWORD BY JEFF POPE

Sadly, as my children get older, the magic of Santa Claus starts to fade. My youngest son, Milo, is eight now and maybe we'll have one more Christmas with him where he still believes. I felt so sad about that, and I wanted to write about that. It's a real dilemma for some parents when their child asks them if Santa Claus is real. Not for me. I haven't got time for the 'I can't lie to my child' brigade - of course he's real. He's as real as anything you want to believe in.

I heard about an annual Santa Claus competition held every year in a little skiing village in the Alps and was lucky enough to be able to visit there one year while the festival was taking place. The sheer joy of seeing fifty or sixty Santas in whichever direction you looked cannot be properly conveyed. You had to be there. It made me realise that, if I might be so bold, there is only one possible collective noun for a gathering of guys in red coats and white beards, and that is a magic of Santas.

The idea of writing a Christmas special based on a 'magic' of Santas started to take shape right there and then. On the journey home I realised that the characters of Colin Armstrong and Howie Scott are, essentially, big kids - so to transpose their bickering to an international Santa competition seemed the perfect fit. In the end it proved to be one of the most enjoyable scripts I've ever had the pleasure to write. We then had an absolute ball filming the story and the different events, with both characters straining to win. It's a Santa slugfest.

But the real struggle was the story within the story. That question again: 'Do you believe in Santa Claus?' Unfortunately there are some people who don't, who would like to spoil it for those of us that do. Howie Scott is one of them, and Colin Armstrong spends the entire film trying to persuade him to change his mind. Belief in Santa Claus goes to the very heart of Colin as, I suppose, it does in me.

Does Colin succeed? I'll let you decide.

Clash of the Santas

CAST LIST

COLIN	ROBSON GREEN
HOWIE	MARK BENTON
JACKIE	NICOLA STEPHENSON
PAULINE	SIAN REEVES
ALICE	EMMA CUNNIFFE
VILLAGE ELDER	EDWARD PETHERBRIDGE
BERYL	IAN PULESTON-DAVIES
VICTORIA SCOTT	EMILLIA PEDDLE
JEAN – LUC	ANTHONY DEBAECK
LIAM	LEE WORSWICK
LEYTON	ALEX RIMMER
JAPANESE SANTA	ALEX LAING
AUSSIE SANTA	STUART WADE
TILDA	CAROLIN STOLTZ
FLORIAN	RALPH GASSMAN
VIRGIN MARY	BIBI NERHEIM
TV PRESENTER	RICHARD SINNOTT
BROOKE	LINZEY COCKER
GORDON	MARK CHATTERTON

Clash of the Santas

SYNOPSIS

The following synopsis is published in the press pack for forward planning purposes only. Please do not reproduce entirely and do not publish the end of the story. Many thanks.

Colin (Robson Green) loves Christmas. It's his favourite time of the year. He loves everything about it - the food, the telly, the presents... everything. But most of all he loves Santa and he particularly loves being Santa at his children's school.

Meanwhile, Howie (Mark Benton) hates Santa and thinks it's all a waste of time. His marriage has broken down and he won't get to see his four-year-old daughter on Christmas morning. The whole idea of Christmas just makes him feel sad and lonely – and Santa, with his stupid grin, big red coat and ho ho ho just rubs salt in the wound.

But this year things are different. This year the school don't need Colin to be Santa for the kids – they're doing a PC-friendly Caribbean Carnival instead. And, at home, his eldest son Leyton (Alex Rimmer) is trying to convince Liam (Lee Worswick) that Santa doesn't really exist.

This year it's Howie who is dressing up as Santa, first as a last minute replacement in a massive shopping centre grotto and then, as a result of that success, he's asked to represent England at the World Santa Championships in Lithuania.

Colin is gutted but manages to tag along as Howie's supporter. But there's a catch: the only way he can go is if he goes as an elf, a girl elf with bells on his shoes.

But embarrassing costumes are the least of Colin's problems. The Santas of the world are a strange bunch – competitive Aussies, kamikaze Japanese, drunken Welshmen, wrestling Iranians and humourless Germans. To make matters worse, Howie keeps losing: he's letting himself down, letting Colin down, but most importantly letting England down.

Their friendship reaches breaking point, but the biggest threat comes in the shape of the enigmatic Rainbow Santa who, along with his supporters, seems to have a very different attitude to the event – one that places all the Santas, including Colin and Howie, in mortal danger.

If Howie and Colin are to save the day, they've got to patch up their friendship and start working together again. And if they're going to get back home in time for Christmas, Howie is going to have to get his faith back in Santa Claus.

Clash of the Santas

CAST INTERVIEWS

ROBSON GREEN plays Colin

Were you pleased to hear Jeff Pope had reunited Colin and Howie for a one-off Christmas special?

I'm always delighted to hear that I'll be working with Mark on a project. *Clash of the Santas* is the most fully rounded story so far in the franchise and Jeff Pope has done a stunning job in creating a hilarious new adventure with all the comedy of the preceding tales.

Can you tell us about Howie and Colin's relationship in *Clash of the Santas*?

The story once again jeopardises Colin and Howie's friendship. The conflict is created when Howie, who is completely bah humbug about Christmas, is asked to be a Santa Claus representing England in an annual competition, and Colin, who adores Christmas, is only allowed to be his supporting Elf. There's huge rivalry, humiliation and jealousy between them and you'll see the lengths that Colin will go to in order to triumph over his friend.

How does Colin eventually become one of the Santas competing in the event?

There are Santas representing Jamaica, Ireland, Germany, Norway and many other countries, but there's one Santa who stands out from the rest, Rainbow Santa, whose attitude defies everything Christmas stands for. When Rainbow Santa is injured, Colin sees it as a way in to the competition, even if it means pretending to agree with the Rainbow Santa's immoral principles.

The Rainbow Santa has two little helpers, Tilda and Florian, who seem to have an agenda than just getting Colin to win the competition. What can you tell us about their involvement in the story?

Tilda and Florian want to strike a blow against the capitalism and commercialisation of Christmas by blowing up the statue of St Nicholas. The spirit of Christmas and everything that Christmas represents is going to be held hostage including Colin. It will be up to Colin and Howie not only to come to the rescue, but also to save everything that's precious about Christmas.

Did you have lots of laughs on set whilst filming?

We had an absolute hilarious time filming *Clash of the Santas*. Even in the more serious scenes we'd still be laughing our heads off. Like many great family films the humour operates on two levels - there's the slapstick fun and the childish antics of the Santa competition running alongside a more sophisticated humour that adults can enjoy.

How comfortable was your elf's costume?

The green tights I had to wear in the height of summer were slightly uncomfortable. They were thick and woolly. I felt sorry for Mark who was dressed head to toe in a big thick Santa's costume in the middle of summer.

What was the most memorable scene to film?

It has to be when we filmed the reindeer race, as we used horses dressed as reindeer. I had to shout 'mush' and pull the reins in order to get the horse to move at the start of the race and on one take I shouted 'mush', whipped the reins, and in no time at all the horse kicked back

Clash of the Santas

sending me flying into the air and down on the ground. Thankfully I was okay but all I could see was Mark laughing and that then set me off laughing too.

What message do you hope viewers watching *Clash of the Santas* will take out from the drama?

That Christmas is only magic if and when we believe it's magic. Santa is real if and when we believe Santa is real. ***Clash of the Santas*** is really about having faith in the magic and wonder of Christmas.

Are you as enthusiastic as Colin is when it comes to Christmas?

Yes I am. There are many similarities between Colin and myself and one is how enthusiastic we both are about Christmas. I believe we should all talk enthusiastically about the spirit of Christmas and appreciate how precious it is. At home we do the lights, we have a traditional Christmas dinner, the children have presents and I love getting the tree and decorating it.

Do you have a Christmas message for viewers?

Believe in the spirit of Christmas and just enjoy Christmas as seen through children's eyes, as we do in the show. Take pleasure from others, value friendships and nurture the imagination of children.

CAST INTERVIEWS

MARK BENTON plays Howie

Were you excited to hear that Jeff Pope had written a script which would reunite Howie and Colin?

Clash of the Santas

It's always exciting when Jeff writes a new adventure for Colin and Howie. I was thrilled to read the script and it was great to be back working with Robson and the team. **Clash of the Santas** is a great new addition to the Christmas film tradition so we're all really proud to have made this.

What can viewers expect from *Clash of the Santas*?

Clash of the Santas has something for everyone. Children can laugh at the antics of the Santas and all the silly events they compete in. Where else can you see Turkey Bowling, Horses dressed as reindeer, chimney climbs, Yo Ho Ho competitions and Go-Karting Santas Sleigh this Christmas. Adults will also be able to identify with the struggles of Colin and Howie and their wives/ ex-wives as they struggle to make Christmas special in difficult times.

What is at the heart of this film?

It's about the value of friendship, the importance of family and the daft, childish rivalry between these two slightly ridiculous but utterly loveable characters, Howie and Colin.

We immediately see that Howie is bah humbug about Christmas. Why is this?

When we first see Howie in **Clash of the Santas** we get the impression he's lost his sparkle and is feeling down about life. Howie's separated from his wife Pauline, he's currently lodging with Colin's family and he's missing his daughter, Victoria, enormously.

How does Howie become the England representative in the annual Santa competition in Lithuania?

He takes his daughter to a grotto at a local shopping centre but whilst they are waiting to see him the Santa Claus walks out. Howie steps in and takes his place so as not to cause any disappointment to anyone. He's then approached by a lady called Alice who asks if he'd like to represent England in the annual Santa competition and feeling he has nothing to lose, he eventually agrees.

How does Colin feel when he discovers Howie will be representing England in the Santa Claus competition?

Colin is fiendishly jealous as he's so into Christmas and loves everything about it. There's a great moment where we see Colin, green with envy saying "it should have been me, why isn't it me?"

All is not lost though as Colin is offered a supporting role in the event.

Colin receives an offer from Alice who says that he can go as Howie's second but it would mean going to the competition dressed as an elf. He doesn't let his vanity get the better of him and agrees. However, when he arrives at the event he soon discovers that all the other elves are female and that his costume is a little skirt teamed with green tights and pixie style red shoes with bells on. As you can imagine Colin isn't impressed, and even more so when Howie makes a joke out of the situation.

Colin soon has a chance to become a Santa and compete in the competition against Howie. What can you tell us about that?

In the go-karting race Howie bumps his kart a little too hard causing an injury to the Rainbow Santa who is forced to step out of the competition. This opens up an opportunity for Colin to be a competing Santa. However, Colin is a very naive character and his relationship with Howie has broken down so he becomes involved with the Rainbow Santa's elves who conspire to be

Clash of the Santas

German terrorists. Unbeknown to anyone, including Colin, the elves are against everything Christmas stands for and they have a plan to destroy the statue of St Nicholas which takes pride of place in the grotto.

Howie has a defeatist approach to the competition until Colin steps in as Rainbow Santa. Is this when the competition really begins for Howie?

Up until that point, Howie was just in the competition for the game and didn't really have the mind set to go out there and win it. As soon Howie discovers that Colin is to be the Rainbow Santa his competitive streak kicks in and it's all about winning.

Filming for *Clash of the Santas* took place in the UK throughout the summer. How did you find being dressed up in a Santas costume in the hot weather?

It was like being in a sauna. I was given a dungaree style suit to wear with a big thick heavy jacket. At first it was fine, but once I got the hat and beard on I became very hot underneath. At one point whilst filming the turkey bowling event I had to take five minutes to cool down.

We'll see Howie compete in many different challenges in order to try and win the title. Which challenges did you enjoy the most?

I absolutely loved filming the scenes for the go-karting race. It was like being a big kid again. The karts were designed with two engines so as you can imagine they rocketed around the racetrack in no time. I'm sure the viewers will see the excitement in my face when they watch this scene for themselves.

In real life is Mark Benton Bah Humbug about Christmas?

Absolutely not, I'm the complete opposite. I adore Christmas and especially Christmas Eve. I love seeing my children's faces when they wake up with such excitement to see if Santa has been. It doesn't get much better than that.

Do you have a traditional family Christmas?

Yes we do. We open our presents together as a family, we have a big Christmas dinner and enjoy the rest of the day playing with the toys the children have received.

Do you have a Christmas message for the viewers?

Have a very, very merry Christmas. I hope you get everything you wanted this year and I hope you all enjoy *Clash of the Santas*.

Clash of the Santas

PRODUCTION CREDITS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER AND WRITER	JEFF POPE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	SAURABH KAKKAR
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EDITOR	JON COSTELLOE
COMPOSER	DANIEL PEMBERTON
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	MARAGARET COOMBES

Clash of the Santas

MAKE UP DESIGNER

COSTUME DESIGNER

PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE

1st ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

2ND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

3RD ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

LOCATION MANAGER

UNIT MANAGER

PRODUCTION CO-ORDINATOR

ASSISTANT CO-ORDINATOR

ART DIRECTOR

SAMANTHA MARSH

EMMA ROSENTHAL

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VINNY FAHY

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VAL WHITE

IAN GALLEY

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